

Introduction to Child Advocacy Training Material

Welcome New Advocates

We look forward to working with you as we take the first steps toward advocating for children in Iowa. Our goal is to help you bring your unique perspective, your personal and professional experiences and skills, and passion for children to your role as an objective advocate for abused and neglected children in Iowa.

We want to get you started right away on this journey so we have designed this Introductory Training Material and the accompanying Workbook to offer some of the information you will need to know to advocate for children and help you understand a bit more the issues that underlie the process of our advocacy work. **Please discuss this material and provide your Workbook to your Local Coordinator once it is completed.**

The next step to becoming a Child Advocacy Board Volunteer after your Introductory Material is completed will be to register for and attend our **Foundations in Child Advocacy** training. This in-person training is designed so we all have the same foundation of understanding about the children we serve and their families. You will receive additional pre-training material that will assist in your application of that Foundation training material, prior to your registered training. The final step in your journey will be to complete your program specific training with your local Child Advocacy Board Staff prior to being sworn in by a Juvenile Court Judge.

Please open the workbook and complete each section as you review the training material. The icon below will let you know when to add your thoughts to the workbook.



Note: We require that you complete the reading, video reviews, and this workbook before participating in the Foundations in Child Advocacy training.

In this training material you will find information on the following topics:

- 1) **Getting started**
- 2) **Our history and mission:**
 - a) *History and mission of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs)*
 - b) *History and mission of Foster Care Review Board (FCRB)*
- 3) **Guiding principles of advocacy**
- 4) **Permanency-A child's right**
- 5) **Concurrent planning**
- 6) **Wrap Up**

It will take you approximately 10-20 minutes to view and complete each of the subject area.

1) **Getting started**

Let's begin by watching the video "[Everyday Heroes](http://youtu.be/8kDpeloe6JE)."

(Please move your cursor over the title and click your "Cntrl" and "Enter" buttons simultaneously to be taken to any included video links.) If you received the material as a paper copy, please go to:
<http://youtu.be/8kDpeloe6JE>.



Please complete the workbook exercises for 1) Getting started

2) **Our history and mission**

A.) History Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)

Concerned over making decisions about abused and neglected children's lives without sufficient information, a Seattle judge, David Soukup, conceived the idea of using trained community volunteers to speak for the best interests of these children in court. In 1977, Judge Soukup established the first Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program.

So successful was this program that other judges across the country soon began utilizing citizen advocates. Today, there is a network of more than 59,000 volunteers that serve abused and neglected children through more than 900 local program offices nationwide.

"As a judge, I had to make tough decisions. I had to decide whether to take a child from the only home he's ever known, or leave him someplace where he might possibly be abused. I needed someone who could tell me what was best for that child from the child's viewpoint. That's what CASA does."

- CASA Founder David W. Soukup Seattle, WA 1977

In January 1986, Iowa was the 45th state to adopt the CASA program. Under the leadership of Chief Justice Ward Reynoldson, the Iowa CASA program began as a pilot project in six counties, three in northwest Iowa and three in central Iowa. After two years as a pilot project, the judicial branch began expanding the CASA program, and it was active in 30 Iowa counties when the administration of the program was transferred to the executive branch in 2003.

The program has continued to grow, and, at the request of Chief Justice Marsha Ternus and Governor Chester Culver, the 2007 Iowa General Assembly appropriated funds to expand the program statewide. CASA volunteers are now recruited to serve in all of Iowa's 99 counties!

Mission Statement

The mission of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association, together with its state and local members, is to support and promote court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that every abused or neglected child can be safe, establish permanence and have the opportunity to thrive.

Keeping our promises: National CASA's strategic objectives

There are five critical pledges we've made on behalf of abused and neglected children. We will work tirelessly until these are met:

1. Every court in the United States recognizes that a CASA/GAL volunteer is essential for a successful outcome for children.
2. Our volunteer base reflects the diversity and cultural makeup of children in the system
3. Every potential donor understands the importance of our mission, and places it at the top of their priority list.
4. Every government official at the local, state, tribal and federal level understands the far-reaching results a CASA/GAL volunteer can achieve, and places our work at the top of their agenda.
5. Every child can thrive in the safe embrace of a loving family.

Why are CASAs needed?

Child abuse and neglect continue to be critical problems in Iowa. Consider these cases:

- An infant is beaten by her father because of her incessant crying. She suffers over a dozen fractures.
- A two year old child is left alone and unsupervised while his eighteen-year old mother goes on drinking binges.
- A group of four siblings aged from 12 months to 14 years are removed from their parents' home because of the father's illegal drug manufacturing and the mother's lack of adequate parenting behavior. The oldest two children had been diagnosed with learning disabilities several years ago.

- A sixteen year old has experienced multiple foster care placements due to his acting-out behavior; his mother is receiving mental health treatment but is still unable to provide a safe home for her son. They want to be together.

“In a world that is so busy the CASA program gives you the ability to make your time count by seeing and feeling that you are making a difference in a life of a child.”

- *Shantel Pausley, CASA Volunteer*

These are just a few types of the thousands of cases with which Iowa's judges and child welfare professionals are faced. Each such case is different and every one of them is complicated by many factors. Compared to the dozens of cases for which each social worker, judge, attorney or service provider is responsible, the CASA volunteer typically is assigned just one case at a time. This means the CASA can offer concentrated attention in a way that others are unable due to their large caseloads.

CASAs keep the child's best interest as their focus, and are expected to always maintain their objectivity about the situation. The CASA Program is independent from the rest of the child welfare system and recommendations made on behalf of the child's best interest are the CASA's own -- they do not have to mirror those of any other professional on the case. The judge expects the CASA's report to be an independent and objective assessment of the child's situation.

Do CASAs make a difference?

Yes! Studies have shown that children in foster care who have a CASA assigned to them receive more services than those without a CASA and are more likely to find a permanent home.

“Being a CASA volunteer has been an incredibly rewarding experience because I'm able to advocate for the voices that aren't always heard. Seeing the look on a child's face when he/she can tell me their story and know they're being heard, is priceless. These are the things that generate a passion for volunteering in this capacity.”

- *Haley Wikoff, CASA Volunteer*

Human Service case workers and other system officials typically carry large caseloads involving many children and complicated family situations. Most are appreciative of the extra time a CASA volunteer can devote to helping insure that an abused or neglected child is not further victimized by either their family or the very system devised to protect the child.

When Iowa judges were surveyed in 2013 about their experiences with CASAs, all that responded agreed or strongly agreed that CASAs “provide information that you do not get from anyone else” and that “CASAs make a positive impact on the child's case.”

Community volunteers serving as CASAs also help their communities become better informed about child abuse and neglect issues close to home. CASAs can advocate not only for the child they are assigned to, but also for all families by identifying needs in the community that are not being met.

What do CASAs do?

A CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) is a trained community volunteer assigned by a judge to represent the best interests of a child under the Court's jurisdiction due to abuse and neglect. A CASA is required to keep the judge informed about the child's needs and how their needs are being met. The CASA's goal is to see that the child is always in a safe, nurturing place and that everyone is working together to resolve problems and achieve permanency for the child.

“Serving as a CASA has been a most incredible experience! How often do we say, 'I really want to make a difference' and then continue to sit on the couch? In the CASA program, you really can make a difference. You are provided training and support all the way along. For my money, this commitment is one of the best investments I've ever made. This has been an over the top experience.” - *Kay Hooper, CASA Volunteer*

The judge assigning the CASA to a case has ordered them to become familiar with all aspects of the child's life. They are expected to keep in regular contact with the child to develop a relationship that allows them to understand and communicate the child's needs and wishes. Each CASA generally is assigned one child or sibling group at a time and typically stays with their assigned case until the child's permanency is established and the case is closed.

Some of a CASA's most important duties are to maintain contact with and collect information from:

- the child's parents
- the attorneys and guardians ad litem involved with the case
- DHS workers
- foster parents, therapists, teachers, doctors, relatives and anyone else who has knowledge of the child's situation

Often, a CASA's interactions with all of these people facilitate helpful communication among those involved with the child that might not otherwise occur.

CASAs also attend pre-placement and placement review staffings regarding the child, as well as all family team meetings and court hearings. They collect and review all records pertaining to the child they are assigned, including court files, state agency (DHS) files, school records and medical records. The CASA is always required to treat the information they collect according to all relevant confidentiality laws and rules.

CASAs are required to regularly submit reports to the Court that present the facts of the case, that describe how the Court's orders are being followed and that offer recommendations regarding the child's best interests.

Please watch the following video: [Court Appointed Special Advocates - Making a Difference](#)

If you received a paper copy, please go to: <http://youtu.be/vCTaWH1sQPI>.

B.) History Foster Care Review Board (FCRB)

Through the joint efforts of citizens, the legislature, and Governor Terry Branstad, the Iowa Citizen Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) program was signed into law in July, 1984. The enabling legislation provided for pilots for the new program to be established in certain counties in cooperation with the Juvenile Court and DHS, and included a provision to expand “as funding permits.” The new law required that trained citizen volunteers provide oversight to help assure the welfare of Iowa’s most vulnerable population, our abused and neglected children. The FCRB was placed under the auspices of the Iowa Child Advocacy Board in July, 2002.

What do FCRBs Do?

The Iowa Foster Care Review Board Program (FCRB) recruits, trains and supports community volunteers to serve on local community boards working to improve how permanency is achieved for Iowa children placed in foster care. Over 30 local boards meet monthly to review the status of children who have been removed from their parents. Advisory recommendations in the child’s best interests are provided by the boards to the Court and other system officials.

Each FCRB volunteer is assigned to an existing board, which meets on a specific day and location each month (ex., 2nd Tuesday at a local community center). The meetings take place during the day, generally starting at 9:00am and continuing until the agenda is completed, but rarely past 4:00pm. Some FCRB meetings are scheduled as ½ days, reflecting the time commitment of the volunteers and the required reviews. Agendas are distributed at least 30 days prior to the meeting, so volunteers know well in advance the length of their next meeting.

In addition to the actual meeting time, volunteers spend time on their own preparing for the meeting by reading the confidential documents which are provided, such as court orders, social histories and case plans.

Please watch the following videos which provide a good overview of the program. The videos are regarding the State of Arizona’s program. They are not entirely reflective of FCRB in Iowa.

[Foster Care Review Board Information Part One](http://youtu.be/vCTaWH1sQPI) or <http://youtu.be/vCTaWH1sQPI>

[Foster Care Review Board Information Part Two](http://youtu.be/RbdFO08W9vk) or <http://youtu.be/RbdFO08W9vk>

[Foster Care Review Board Information Part Three](http://youtu.be/fIYTAsgklkM) or <http://youtu.be/fIYTAsgklkM>



Please complete the workbook exercises for 2) Our history and mission

3.) Guiding principles of advocacy

There are two key principles to consider when working as a volunteer:

1. **Best Interest** - You will be hearing this term used a lot in meetings and in the court room. Judges use the "*best interest of the child*" standard when making their decision in child abuse and neglect cases. There has been a long debate about the meaning of "*best interest of the child*," and though many books have been written on the subject, there is still no concise legal definition for this standard.
2. **Minimum Sufficient Level of Care (MSL)** - Removing a child from their home is a drastic remedy because removal is traumatic for the child. Removal should only happen when parents cannot meet the minimum of what it takes to keep the child safe and meet their basic needs, commonly known as the "minimum sufficient level of care."

Please watch the video on the guiding principles. [Best Interest and MSL](http://youtu.be/1cESzVa8Jc4) or go to :
<http://youtu.be/1cESzVa8Jc4>

The "Best Interest" Principle—What It Means

- A safe home
- A permanent home
- As quickly as possible

Parents typically decide what is best for their children and then provide it for them to the extent that they can. They are their children's best advocates. The child protection system intervenes in families' lives when parents cannot or will not protect, promote and provide for their children's basic needs. A CASA/GAL volunteer becomes the advocate when the parents cannot—or will not—fulfill this role.

Judges use the "best interest of the child" standard when making their decisions in child abuse and neglect cases. Child welfare and juvenile court practitioners and scholars have debated the meaning of "best interest of the child" for years. Books have been written on the subject; however, there is still no concise legal definition for this standard. In cases where the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) applies, the law presumes that it is always in the best interest of an Indian child* to have the tribe determine what is best for the child's future.

*This curriculum uses the terms "Indian child" and "Indian custodian" in accordance with the legal definitions set out in the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Minimum Sufficient Level of Care (MSL)

Removing a child from his or her home because of abuse and/or neglect is a drastic remedy. Because removal is so traumatic for the child, both the law and good practice require that agencies keep the child in the home when it is possible to do so and still keep the child safe. Children should be removed only when parents cannot meet the "minimum sufficient level of care." This standard describes what must be in place for the child to remain in his or her home. The same standard is also

used to determine whether or not parents have made sufficient progress so that a child can be safely returned to the family home. The minimum sufficient level of care is determined by a number of factors, each of which must be looked at specifically in relation to the case at hand. Factors to consider include:

The Child's Needs

Is the parent providing for the following needs at a basic level?

- Physical (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, safety, protection)
- Emotional (attachment between parent and child)
- Developmental (education, special help for children with disabilities)

Social Standards

Is the parent's behavior within or outside commonly accepted child-rearing practices in our society?

Here are some examples: In terms of discipline, whipping a child with a belt was generally thought to be appropriate during the first half of the twentieth century but is now widely considered abusive. Contemporary families frequently use a short "time out" as a punishment for young children. In terms of school attendance, it is a widely held expectation that parents send all children to school (or home-school them) until they reach the age limit at which attendance is no longer compulsory. Social standards also apply in medical care, where immunizations and regular medical/dental care are the standard.

Community Standards

Does the parent's behavior fall within reasonable limits, given the specific community in which the family resides?

Here are some examples: The age at which a child can be safely left alone varies significantly from urban to suburban to rural communities. The age at which a child is deemed old enough to care for other children is largely determined by cultural and community norms. Even something as simple as sending a 9-year-old child to the store might fall within or outside those standards, depending on neighborhood safety, the distance and traffic patterns, the weather, the child's clothing, the time of day or night, the ability of the child and the necessity of the purchase.

Communities can be geographical or cultural. An example of a nongeographical, cultural community is a Native American tribe in which members live in a variety of locales but still share a common child-rearing standard. According to the Indian Child Welfare Act, the minimum sufficient level of care standard must reflect the community standards of the tribe of the Indian child.



Please complete exercises in your workbook 3.) Guiding principles of advocacy

4.) Permanency: A child's right

What does the term "family" mean to you? Who do you call family? Who provides most of the care? Who is responsible for you, for your well being, your legal identity and status, your connections in the future? Functions and roles of family are different in different regions of the country; when you hear the word, *permanency*, what comes to mind?

Permanency: what is it?

All children need a “parent,” a primary attachment figure who will care for them through life’s ups and downs, protect them and guide them now and into adulthood. In our culture, typically the parents are a father and mother, but one or more other caring adults who are willing to commit unconditionally to the child can also meet the child’s need for permanence.

One of your primary goals as a child advocate volunteer is to advocate for a safe, permanent home as soon as possible, honoring the child’s culture and sense of time. While there is never a guarantee of permanence, having such intentions can ensure that you are working toward a plan that supports permanence. At a very basic level, permanence is most probable when the legal parent is also the emotional parent as well as the parenting figure present in the child’s life.

There are two possible “permanent” resolutions:

1. Return to parent
2. Adoption by a relative or non-relative

A third option, while not truly “permanent,” is sometimes considered an appropriate choice when the other two are not available to a child. It is the next best thing:

3. Placement and custody or guardianship with relatives

It is important to know that some Native Americans have a strong bias against adoption, and certain tribes do not approve of adoption. This creates a special situation when considering the permanent options for an Indian child. In some cases, placement with an Indian custodian can truly be considered permanent.

Permanency in child welfare means a legally permanent, nurturing family for every child. Child welfare professionals first focus on preserving families and preventing the need to place children outside of their homes. When children must be removed from their homes to ensure their safety, permanency planning efforts focus on returning them home as soon as is safely possible or placing them with another permanent family. Other permanent families may include adoptive families, guardians, or relatives who obtain legal custody.

Child welfare agencies employ numerous strategies to achieve permanency for children. Permanency planning involves decisive, time-limited, goal-oriented activities to maintain children within their families of origin or place them with other permanent families. Permanency plans include the child's

goal for permanency, the tasks required to achieve the goal, and the roles and responsibilities of all involved.

Please watch the following video: [Kadia's Story](#) or go to: http://youtu.be/M17UYHI_QNk



Please answer the questions in your workbook 3.) Permanency: A child's right.

5.) Concurrent planning

Concurrent planning is an approach that seeks to eliminate delays in attaining permanent families for children and youth in foster care. Effective implementation requires comprehensive and early assessment. It involves identifying and working toward a child's primary permanency goal (such as reunification with the birth family) while simultaneously identifying and working on a secondary goal (such as guardianship with a relative). This practice can shorten the time to achieve permanency if efforts toward the primary goal prove unsuccessful because progress has already been made toward the secondary goal.

Given the two possible permanent resolutions to a case -- return to parent and adoption by a relative or non-relative -- your role as an advocate is to encourage what is called "concurrent planning," which means working on two plans at the same time from the very beginning of a case: one to return the child home and another to find an alternative permanent placement. Traditionally, case management in child welfare has consisted of efforts to reunite children with their parent(s). If those efforts failed, a second plan would be pursued. This created a process that kept many children in foster care for too many years.

Concurrent planning was developed as an alternative that moves a case more quickly through the system with better results. The concurrent planning approach is family-centered, with parents involved in decision making from the start.

Throughout the case, parents are regularly given direct, culturally sensitive feedback about their progress. From the start of the case, while providing services to the parents, the caseworker explores kinship options, the applicability of the Indian Child Welfare Act and possible foster/adoptive situations for the child.

Engaging Parents in Permanency Planning

Permanency planning for children is best done with the involvement of children's birth parents and other family members. Whether the permanency goal is reunification, adoption, guardianship, or placement with a relative, working closely with the children's parents embodies family-centered practice and can facilitate permanency more quickly than if parents are not engaged.

Foster Parents' Role in Supporting Permanency

Increasingly, foster parents are seen as key players in the team working to achieve permanency for children in foster care. Foster parents may work with birth parents and support reunification efforts. They also may consider adopting the children in their care if the children cannot return home. As the children's primary caretakers, foster parents can have significant roles in carrying out the tasks in the permanency plan.

Family Team Meetings

Family team meetings are a non-adversarial, voluntary process that allows the parties involved to discuss permanency decisions in the best interests of the child with the help of a neutral third party. Parties are more invested in the outcome because they participated in decision-making. Family team meetings may include birth parents, foster/adoptive parents, relatives, the child, the agency worker, attorneys, and CASA's.



Please answer the questions in your workbook 5.) Concurrent planning

6.) Wrap Up:

Please remember to provide your **completed workbook** to your Local Coordinator so you can discuss the material and have answered any additional questions. You will then be directed to contact our State office to register for our **Foundations in Child Advocacy Training**. After you have successfully completed the Foundations Training you will return to your local area where you will be provided with your remaining program specific training. Good Luck and we look forward to working with you!